

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3293

INFO USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6108

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL SCENE BEGINS TO TAKE DEFINITE SHAPE

REF BA 5975

1. SUMMARY. PERON AND ISABEL HAVE NOW BEEN REGISTERED AS THE FREJULI CANDIDATES. THEY WILL BE SUPPORTED AS WELL BY THE REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTIAN PARTY (PRC), THE UNION POPULAR, ABELARDO RAMOS' POPULAR LEFTIST FRONT (FIP), AND POSSIBLY BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCA) AND OSCAR ALENDE'S INTRASIGNETES. AGUSTIN TOSCO HAS ANNOUNCED HE WILL NOT RUN, THUS LEAVING NO VIABLE CANDIDATE OF THE LEFT. ON THE RIGHT, NUEVA FUERZA HAS DECIDED TO ABSTAIN, AS WILL AMERICO GHIOLDI'S SOCIALIST DEMOCRATS (PSD). AT THIS POINT, IT APPEARS THERE WILL BE ONLY FOR TICKETS - PERON, BALBIN, MANRIQUE AND JUAN CORAL OF THE PST. THE LATTER IS NOT A SERIOUS CANDIDATE AND MAY GET LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF THE VOTE. AS PERONISTS AND RADICALES BEGIN TO EXCHANGE BARBED COMMENTS, THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT THE SPIRIT OF CONSENSUS POLITICS IS BEGINNING TO BREAK DOWN. A HIGHLY PARTISAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN COULD AGAIN PUT THE MAJOR PARTIES AT ONE ANOTHER'S THROATS. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE JUSTICIALISTA PARTY CONGRESS RECONVENED ON AUG 18 TO HEAR

PERON'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH. ISABELITA STOOD BESIDE HIM BUT SAID NOTHING. THE SPEECH, IN EFFECT, INITIATED THE PERONIST ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND WAS OBVIOUSLY GEARED TO A PARTISAN AUDIENCE (SEE BELOW).

3. REPS OF ALL PARTIES IN FREJULI MET ON AUG 16 TO CONFIRM THE CONTINUATION OF THEIR ELECTORAL ALLIANCE AND TO INDICATE PERON AND ISABEL AS THEIR CANDIDATES. ON AUG 18, THE FRONT'S LEGAL REPS FORMALLY REGISTERED PERON-PERON AS THEIR TICKET FOR SEP 23.

4. HORACIO SUELDO'S REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTIAN PARTY (PRC) HELD ITS CONVENTION OVER THE WEEKEND AND ALSO DECIDED TO SUPPORT PERON. THE OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE ALIANZA POPULAR, OSCAR ALENDE'S PARTIDO INTRANSIGENTE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCA), WILL HOLD THEIR CONVENTIONS THIS WEEK. BOTH ARE EXPECTED TO BACK PERON - THOUGH NOT WITHOUT SOME RESERVATIONS. THE UNION POPULAR, WHICH SPLIT PRIOR TO THE MARCH ELECTIONS, WITH ITS MAJORITY BLOCK VOTING TO SUPPORT MANRIQUE, REUNITED AT ITS CONVENTION LAST WEEK AND DECIDED TO THROW ITS SUPPORT TO PERON. MANRIQUE WAS WEAKENED, AND PERON STRENGTHENED, TOO, BY THE DEFECTION OF CELESTINO GELSI'S VANGUARDIA FEDERAL, A PROVINCIAL PARTY FROM TUCUMAN.

5. NUEVA FUERZA HELD ITS CONVENTION ON AUG 18 AND DECIDED NOT TO FIELD A CANDIDATE. SOME OF ITS VOTES MAY GO TO MANRIQUE, AS MAY THOSE OF AMERICO GHIOLDI'S PSD, WHICH IS ALSO SITTING OUT THE SEP 23 ELECTIONS.

6. PERON'S POSITION WAS ENHANCED SIGNIFICANTLY BY AGUSTIN TOSCO'S ANNOUNCEMENT FROM CORDOBA ON AUG 15 THAT HE WILL NOT BE A CANDIDATE. THE PREVIOUS DAY, JUAN CORAL OF THE PST HAD OFFERED TO RESIGN HIS OWN CANDIDACY IF TOSCO WOULD HEAD THE PST TICKET. TOSCO HAD EARLIER BEEN THINKING SERIOUSLY OF ACCEPTING. APPARENTLY, HOWEVER, THE OBVIOUS DISADVANTAGES OF ENTERING A RACE IN WHICH THE LEADING CANDIDATE ALREADY HAS A COMMANDING MARGIN, PLUS THE PCA'S PUBLIC COMMENT THAT TOSCO SHOULD NOT RUN, LEST HIS CANDIDACY SERVE FURTHER TO DIVIDE THE POPULAR FORCES, WERE FACTORS WHICH CAUSED HIM TO CHANGE HIS MIND.

7. THE RESULT IS TO LEAVE NO EFFECTIVE CHALLENGER TO PERON'S LEFT; HENCE, DISGRUNTLED YOUTH AND LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN GENERAL HAVE LITTLE

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RECOURSE BUT TO VOTE FOR PERON OR CAST BLANK BALLOTS. MOST WILL PROBABLY STICK WITH HIM. THE LEAD EDITORIAL IN LAST WEEK'S EL DEACAMISADO, THE ORGAN OF THE MAIN BODY OF THE PERONIST YOUTH, WAS SIGNIFICANT IN THIS RESPECT. IT EXPRESSED PUZZLEMENT (AND OBVIOUS PAIN) OVER ISABEL'S CANDIDACY, BUT VOWED LOYALLY TO SUPPORT THE PERON-PERON TICKET ANYWAY. THE CENTRAL THEME MIGHT BE SUMMED UP AS: "WE DON'T UNDERSTAND, BUT WE ASSUME THE LEADER KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING. WE HOPE SO."

8. THE SAME EDITORIAL VOICED DISAPPOINTMENT, NONETHELESS, AT WHAT SEEMS TO BE A RETROGRESSIVE STEP WITH RESPECT TO NATIONAL UNITY. HOW COULD THIS BE (ISABEL'S CANDIDACY), THE EDITORIAL ASKED, WHEN ALL PERON'S ACTIONS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS BACK IN 1971 HAD BEEN AIMED AT NATIONAL UNITY? "IT WAS FOR THAT THAT THE HORA DEL PUEBLO WAS FORMED, AND THE FRENTE JUSTICIA-LISTA, AND THAT WAS WHAT WE UNDERSTOOD WHEN PERON SAID 'D GO ANYWHERE WITH BALBINBALBIN WANTED TO JOIN US IN THIS GREAT UNDERTAKING. HE WAS LEFT WAITING."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6108

9. INDEED, THERE WAS OTHER EVIDENCE OVER THE WEEKEND THAAT THE SPIRIT OF UNITY AND CONSENSUS IS BEGINNING TO WEAR THIN. THE EMBASSY'S UCR CONTACTS, DISGUSTED AT WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO HAVE BEEN PERON'S CHICANERY IN LEADING THEM TO BELIEVE HE WANTED A PERON-BALBIN TICKET, ARE INDICATING THEIR PARTY INTENDS TO RUN A FAIRLY TOUGH, PARTISAN CAMPAIGN. UCR VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DE LA RUA AND A NUMBER OF OTHER RANKING RADICALES HAVE ALREADY CRITICIZED THE WAY THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN ADMINISTERED SINCE MAY 25, AND EVEN PARTY LEADER BALBIN STATED PUBLICLY ON AUG 17 THAT THE GOVT SO FAR "HAD NOT BEEN WHAT THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN LED TO EXPECT". BALBIN ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE WHOLE IDEA OF A PERON-BALBIN TICKET MIGHT HAVE BEEN NOR MORE THAN A SMOKE SCREEN.

10. IN HIS AUG 18 SPEECH (SEE ABOVE), PERON INDIRECTLY RESPONDED TO THESE AND OTHER BARBS, SAYING THOSE WHO CRITICIZED THE GOVT

AFTER IT HAD BEEN IN OFFICE ONLY THREE MONTHS SEEMED NAIVELY TO HAVE EXPECTED A MIRACLE. HE CONTINUED TO INSIST HE WAS ALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND THAT HE CONSIDERED EVEN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES "TO BE FIRENDS." BUT THE WHOLE TONE OF HIS SPEECH WAS DISTINCLTY PARTISAN AND AT ONE POINT HE EVEN SEEMED TO BE TAKING A SWIPE AT FRONDIZI'S MID (MOVEMENT FOR INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT), ONE OF HIS FREJULI ALLIES. THERE WERE THOSE, HE SAID, WHO SEEMED TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT FOR ITS OWN SAKE AND WHO COMPLAINED THAT THE GOVT DID NOT ALREADY HAVE A BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT. ARGENTINA, HE SAID, DID NOT WANT TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF SOME OF THE LEADING INDUSTRIAL-CONFIDENTIAL

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IZED COUNTRIES WHICH HAD DEVELOPED BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTS AND WERE NOW SUFFERING FOR IT.

11. COMMENT. THESE FIRST SIGNS OF A DIMINUTION, OR MUTING, OF THE URGE TOWARD NATIONAL CONSENSUS ARE PERHAPS THE MOST DISTURBING RESULT OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS INITIATED BY CAMPORA'S REMOVAL. PERHAPS A PERON-BALBIN CANDIDACY WAS TOO MUCH TO HAVE EXPECTED. AS ONE POLITICIAN POINTED OUT IN AN INTERVIEW LAST WEEK, THE TWO PARTIES ARE STILL TOO DIFFERENT TO HAVE LENT THEMSELVES EASILY TO SUCH A SOLUTION. EVEN SO, MANY ARGENTINES ARE INTENSELY DISAPPOINTED THAT IT DID NOT WORK OUT. AS SUGGESTED ABOVE, THE RADICALES ARE NOT ONLY DISAPPOINTED, THEY ARE ANGRY AND DISGUSTED WITH PERON. NEITHER THEY NOR MOST OTHER NON-PERONIST OBSERVERS HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF CONFIDENCE IN PERON'S PLAN FOR A COUNCIL OF STATE - EVEN THOUGH HE CONTINUES TO SAY HE WILL OFFER BALBIN ANY JOB HE WANTS IN THE COUNCIL

"HE HAD HIS CHANCE TO TAKE A LONG AND IMAGINATIVE STEP TOWARD NATIONAL UNITY," ONE UCR SOURCE COMMENTED. "HE REFUSED TO TAKE IT. NOW HE HAS TURNED TO THE IDEA OF A COUNCIL OF STATE SIMPLY TO MAKE US BELIEVE HE IS STILL INTERESTED. IT IS JUST CAMOUFLAGE."

12. MANY STILL HOPE THAT PERON WILL AT LEAST MINUTE REACT TO THE ADVERSE RESPONSE TO ISABEL'S CANDIDACY BY ASKING HER TO RESIGN IN FAVOR OF SOMEONE ELSE. THIS COULD BE, BUT AT THE MOMENT THERE IS VERY LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST HE WIL DO SO. ON THE CONTRARY, THE EVIDENCE WOULD INDICATE HE INTENDS TO LEAVE HER ON THE TICKET.

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